



## **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

### **DECISION NOTICE**

#### **Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area Addition Environmental Assessment**

**March 12, 2014**

Region 4 Headquarters  
4600 Giant Springs Rd.  
Great Falls, MT 59405  
(406) 454-5840

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE CONSIDERED**

#### **Proposed Action**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase in fee title approximately 320 acres of timbered grasslands and wetland habitat west of Bynum, Montana, for addition to the existing 10,397-acre Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The purchase and management of this property would protect important year-round grizzly bear habitat, as well as winter range for elk and mule deer. The purchase price for the property is \$575,000. Funding for the proposed acquisition is through a Section 6 ESA Non-Traditional Program grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service of \$392,007 with the balance of the acquisition cost would be provided by The Conservation Fund as match for the grant.

#### **No Action**

The No Action alternative for this project is described as FWP not purchasing the 320-acre parcel from The Conservation Fund. The Conservation Fund would likely search for another buyer.

### **MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PUBLIC PROCESS**

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review of the proposed action on February 7, 2014 and accepted public comment until 5:00 P. M. on March 11, 2014.

Notice of the proposal and availability of the Draft EA was published in the *Great Falls Tribune* and the *Choteau Acantha*. Copies of the environmental assessment were distributed to interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "Recent Public Notices"

and "Submit Public Comments") during the public comment period. An FWP public notice was issued February 7, 2014 and posted on FWP's website (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "News Releases").

### **SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT**

FWP received 14 total comments. A breakdown of the comments is as follows: 10 were in support of the proposed action (purchase of the 320-acre addition), three supported the No Action Alternative, and one did not specify.

Five comments expressed that addition provides important habitat for grizzly bears and other wildlife species. Three comments expressed that the addition would enhance recreational opportunities on Blackleaf WMA. Two comments expressed concern about Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks purchasing land. One comment opposed the addition without stating a reason. One comment expressed concern regarding publication in the local newspaper and closing of the comment period.

### **RESPONSE TO COMMENTS**

Below are FWP responses to comments. For ease of response, similar comments are grouped together if they express a similar view.

Comment: Ten respondents to the proposed action voiced support for the preferred alternative.

*FWP Response: These comments of support are duly noted.*

Comment: Two respondents to the proposed action voiced support for no action alternative citing opposition to the state owning land.

*FWP Response: While duly noted, general discussion and analyses regarding FWP purchasing lands is beyond the scope of this EA.*

Comment: One respondent to the proposed action voiced support for no action alternative without citing a reason.

*FWP Response: This comment of opposition is duly noted.*

Comment: One respondent to the proposed action did not voice support or opposition for the proposed action but cited concern over the length of the comment period between publication in the local newspaper and closing of public comment.

*FWP Response: The comment period was extended to allow additional opportunity for comment after publication of the notice in the local newspaper.*


### **DECISION**

In reviewing all the public comment, evaluating the environmental effects, and other relevant information, I recommend that FWP pursue the completion of the Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area Addition and recommend that the F&W Commission approve the proposed

action as well. This action will also require the approval of the Montana Board of Land Commissioners at an upcoming meeting.

Through the MEPA process, FWP found no significant impacts on the human or physical environments associated with this proposal. Therefore, the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and an environmental impact statement is not required.

After review of this proposal, it is my decision to accept the draft EA as supplemented by this Decision Notice; in combination, these documents constitute the Final EA. FWP believes the completion of this project is in the best interests of wildlife, habitat conservation, and public recreation.

  
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Gary Bertellotti  
Region 4 Fish and Wildlife Supervisor  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

  
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Date